



AN
INAUGURAL DISSERTATION
ON
DYSENTERY.

SUBMITTED TO THE EXAMINATION

OF THE

HONORABLE ROBERT SMITH, PROVOST,

AND OF THE

Regents of the University of Maryland;

FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MEDICINE.

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PRINTED BY

S. SNOWDEN,

ALEXANDRIA.

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To the Professors of Physick,
IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND,

THIS Dissertation is dedicated, as a
testimony of respect due to their talents,
medical science, and individual polite-
ness as gentlemen,

By their humble Servant,

THE AUTHOR.

To Doctor Elisha C. Dick.

DEAR SIR,

AS a formal dedication might not be agreeable to you, I hope, Sir, you will permit me to inscribe the following pages, as a partial evidence of those sentiments of high respect and esteem, entertained for yourself and truly amiable family.—That you and your family may be blest, with health, tranquility and lasting Peace, is the wish of

Your sincere Friend and Pupil,

JOHN D. VOWELL.

INTRODUCTION.

DYSENTERY, the subject of this Dissertation, is a disease upon which much has been said, and a great deal written, by able men and very enlightened pens--Therefore it cannot be presumed that a Student can have in his profession much which is new or instructive.

A correct method of treatment is now generally understood ; much innovation is therefore unnecessary.

That I may not be charged, with imprudence, it may be well to state, that I write not for fame--the laws of the University demand it: I write not from choice--necessity compels me.

DYSENTERY.

THE word Dysentery, in Latin Dysenteria, and Greek is derived from *δυσ* difficulty, and *εντεριον* the intestines; importing a difficulty, or a disturbance of the bowels.

The Dysentery, is termed by the Latin writers, *Difficultas Intestinorum*; Celsus calls it *Tormina*. Cælius Aurelianus, *Rheumatismus cum Ulcere*; & it is thus described by Hippocrates in Lib. 3, Chap. 5, de *Victus Ratione Sanorum*.

“ When the body is heated, and there is an acrimonious purging, with corrosion and ulceration of the intestines, and bloody stools; the disease is called a Dysentery, and is a severe and dangerous disorder.

Galen de *Locis Affectis*, Lib. 6, Chap. 2, says “ It is necessary to understand properly the meaning of the word Dysentery, as the appellation itself signifies an ulcer of the intestines. At first there is a discharge of acrid bile, then abrasions of the intestines follow, afterwards blood is excreted with the abrasions; and this constitutes a true dysentery.

Galen then proceeds—“ When abrasions of the bowels only are discharged, it is to be observed, whether any fat substance is voided with them; for then the ulcer is in the large intestines. When blood is voided, it is necessary to observe whether it is mixed universally with the excrements, or whether it is only superficially upon some part of them. If it be mixed with them, it shews that the ulcer is in the superior intestines; if it appear on the surface, the ulcer is in the inferior intestines. The same observation applies in regard to the abrasions, in some degree; and they will also shew by their proper substance, which intestine is affected. When the ulcer is in the rectum, the disease is called a *Tenesmus*; it is attended with vehement straining, and a constant desire of going to stool, voiding at the same time but little, which in the beginning is pituitous and pinguinous, but in length of time, a species of abrasion is also voided: but through the whole of the disease, the *feces* from the superior intestines, have nothing of this sort mixed with them.

In Lib. 11, chap. 5, *De Locis Affectis*, Galen says griping pains in the intestines are caused by a corroding humor, for which reason the Dysentery is always preceded by these pains; which with an ulceration of the intestines, the modern physicians, and many of the ancients, call a Dysentery. Some of the latter not only term this, but also any bloody excretion, a Dysentery.

Hippocrates uses the word *Dysenteria*, in a general sense, as well as Galen, distinguishing this disease from the *Alvi Profluvium*, or *Diarrhœa*; and from *Levitas Intestinorum*, or *Lientery*.

The *Diarrhœa* is described by Aretæus to be a flux of liquid and unconnected aliment, and by Galen to be a plentiful flux of the belly, without any inflammation or exulceration of the intestines. The *Lientery* is a disease, according to Hippocrates and Galen, wherein the food passes through the body, unchanged, uncorrupted, liquid and without pain; and the body is wasted.

Some modern writers have disputed with the ancients, respecting the propriety of describing the dysentery, with an ulceration of the bowels, because an ulceration is not a primary symptom, nor necessary to constitute a dysentery; being rather the effect than the cause of the disease.

Many different kinds of Dysentery, have been enumerated by authors; as the acute, chronic, bilious, malignant, putrid, benign, red, white, &c. which distinctions are only applicable to the different appearances of the same disease, as influenced by climate, season, and constitution.

Having premised thus much concerning the definition of the disease, as given by some of the ancients; we shall now endeavor to take such a view of the subject, as will be more in conformity with the ideas entertained of it, by modern writers.

SYMPTOMS.

The Dysentery is a disease generally considered contagious, in which there is an inflammation of the mucous membrane of the intestines; the patient has frequent stools, accompanied with much griping, a tenesmus and fever; the stools, although frequent, are generally small in quantity; and the matter voided is chiefly mucous, streaked with blood.

The natural fœces seldom appear, and when they do, it is usually under the form of small, compact, hard substances, known by the name of *scybalæ*.

When the inflammation begins to occupy the lower part of the intestinal canal, the stools become more frequent and less abundant, and in passing through the inflamed parts, they occasion great pain, so that every evacuation is preceded by a severe griping, and also a rumbling noise.

Sometimes what is voided consists merely of a mucous matter, without any appearance of blood, exhibiting that disease which is known by the name of *Morbus Mucosus*.

It has been doubted, and I am disposed to think with propriety, whether this disease has any claim to the epithet, contagious.

There is but one, and that a conclusive experiment by which the question can be settled, as proposed by Dr. Potter; which I believe has not been adopted, viz: Let the faecal evacuation of a person laboring under dysentery be thrown into the bowels of a healthy person.

CAUSES.

This disease occurs generally in summer and autumn, and is produced by moist weather quickly succeeding intense heat or great drought; whereby the vessels of the surface of the body become debilitated, and incapacitated for the discharge of their proper function; it is in this way, that the intestinal canal is brought into suffering, and not, as we suppose, by any particular and direct determination of fluids to it.

Dysentery is also produced by unwholesome and putrid food, and by noxious exhalations and vapors, arising from vegetable substances in a state of putrefaction; hence the reason of its appearance in armies located in the neighborhood of low marshy grounds.

Warm climates appear to be more favorable to the production of this disease, than cold ones; in the West Indies, during the rainy season of the year, which is during the months of August, September and October, it is apt to appear, and affect very generally the negroes on the plantations, in the different colonies.

Acids, as Rhenish Wines, acid unripe fruit, or large quantities of ripe fruit becoming acid in the stomach, may give occasion to this disease.

DIAGNOSIS.

There are two diseases which bear some resemblance to the one now under consideration : Diarrhæa and Hemorrhoids ; but a diagnosis sufficiently clear and distinct, may without difficulty be drawn.

Dysentery may readily be distinguished from diarrhæa, by fever being absent in the last, the tenesmus and griping are also inconsiderable ; the appearance of the matter evacuated will assist us, which in the one disease, is feculent or mixed with alimentary matter ; in the other, sanguineous or putrid.

In Hemorrhoids there is no tenesmus, but when there is, we are still able to distinguish the two diseases ; for in hemorrhoids the blood is first evacuated, in dysentery not so. In piles, mucus is seldom or never discharged.

PROGNOSIS.

A gentle and universal diaphoresis, moderate pyrexia, the evacuations becoming less frequent, and more of a natural color and consistence ; the strength little impaired ; sediment in the urine, and a gradual diminution of the griping and tenesmus, are to be considered favorable appearances.

But when the disease has become habitual from long continuance ; violent and distressing tenesmus ; vomiting ; hiccup ; apthæ ; difficult deglutition ; convulsions ; cold extremities ; the tongue preternaturally red and dry ; the pain suddenly ceasing ; great prostration of strength ; the fæces extremely foetid ; involuntary evacuations ; intermitting pulse ; the disease being complicated with others ; or with affections of the liver, with intermittent fever, scurvy, &c. We are to consider these as symptoms of a fatal termination of the disease.

TREATMENT.

There is probably no disease, for the cure of which more remedies have been advised, than for the one now under consideration ; yet there are but few which merit our attention. We shall therefore endeavor, in as concise a manner as possible, to lay down such observations, as may be

useful in effecting the removal of this very painful and distressing malady.

In the commencement of the disease, particularly in cities, it is frequently marked with an inflammatory character; which circumstance renders it less fatal than in the country, where it is apt to assume a typhus disposition.

If the inflammatory symptoms are considerable it may be advisable to take away a few ounces of blood; but if these are slight, we should be exceedingly cautious in the use of the lancet.

The most eminent of our late practitioners, and of greatest experience in this disease, are of opinion that the most proper method of treatment is purging assiduously employed.

When we depend upon purging for the cure of this disease, these should be frequently repeated, in small doses, with a view of keeping up a constant action on the bowels—glauber salt, phosphas sodæ, castor oil, or manna, may be administered. Calomel in some cases may be considered as possessing qualities preferable to every other cathartic we can employ; should the mouth become affected, from the use of calomel, we may expect an abatement, if not an entire removal of the symptoms.

The combination of opium with calomel cannot be proper, if the inflammatory disposition existing in the system be considerable. The greatest benefit has been supposed to result from the use of emetics in this disease; although we would not place too much reliance upon these, yet at the same time, there is no doubt they may be very generally employed in the commencement of the disease with advantage; and those particularly which have some action on the intestines.

Should the fever continue, with hot and dry skin, it may then be necessary to make use of diaphoretic medicines. For this purpose, the Vit. cerat, antim, is an eligible preparation. Ipecacuanha is also useful, as it possesses some diaphoretic property.

This method of treatment may be considered as being applicable to that state of the disease which is not of the Typhus character. When the disease is of this nature, cathartics, and all depleting medicines are generally injurious. We should rely upon the use of tonics and stimulants. Madeira Wine in large quantities is to be ranked amongst the most powerful remedies. The system should be kept under its influence, the effect of one dose not permitted to subside before another is administered. Bark is not to be passed over unnoticed in this disease.

There is another state of Dysentery which may now be mentioned:—it is that, which is known by the name of Chronic Dysentery.

Mercury may be administered with the greatest hopes of success in this state of the disease.

It has also been advised, that the patient should change his place of residence ; which can be done with advantage either from a cold to a warm, or from a warm to a cold climate.

Astringents have also been advantageously exhibited ; the Tinct. Kino in the dose of a tea spoonful, given three or four times a day is a remedy advised by Dr. Potter.

Some of the essential oils have been highly spoken of in the treatment of this disease.

If no new theory or practice be suggested, or any particular ones selected from a vast assemblage as the most eligible, let this be ascribed to the firm persuasion that *experience* alone can qualify for such a task, and the prudence of a student will of course decline it.

Book taken apart, leaves deacidified
with magnesium bicarbonate. All
leaves supported with lens tissue.
Leaves mended. Resewed with new all-
rag end paper signatures & unbleached
linen hinges. Rebound in quarter un-
bleached linen with Fabriane paper
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